Wicked Problems of Child Welfare

North Carolina Problems, North Carolina Solutions

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May 6, 2015
Wicked Problems

A term coined in the policy sciences to describe a problem that defies ordinary solutions because of contradictory definitions of the nature of the problem, the problem’s interconnectedness to a lot of other problems, and the lack of consensus about what constitutes successful or unsuccessful resolution of the problem.
Evidence-Based Solutions

- Extend foster care support beyond age 18.
- Prioritizing adoption over long-term foster care.
- Supporting permanent guardianship over diversion to informal kinship care.
- Extending post-adoption support and preservation to insure these homes remain intact.
- Investing in evidence-based, post-permanency solutions to reverse the effects of child maltreatment on brain development and to ensure children’s social and emotional well-being remains secure.
Scope of Public Interest

**CONSTRAINED**
(Narrow Scope of Public Interest)

**Safety**

Should public child welfare be satisfied primarily with the safe reduction in the number of children entering foster care or should it set its sights on a diffuse range of child well-being improvements, such as fostering secure parent-child attachments, intervening when child development lags behind normative milestones, and offering extended support to youth who age out of the foster care system?

**Well-Being**

**UNCONSTRAINED**
(Diffuse Scope of Public Interest)
Should the primary group relationships of family, extended kinship, and voluntary association be responsible for achieving these aims largely on their own, or should the secondary structures of market institutions and state authority ultimately be held accountable for ensuring equal developmental opportunities and minimum well-being for all children?
Political Polarization

U.S. Senate 1879-2013
Party Means on Liberal-Conservative Dimension

Polarized America, voteview.com
Calls for Policy Waivers and Rigorous Experimentation...
April 17, 2015 WASHINGTON — Today, U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Representative Paul Ryan (R-WI) announced that they have introduced their Evidence-Based Policymaking Commission Act of 2015 and working to pass it this Congress. The bill would establish a 15-member commission to study how best to expand the use of data to evaluate the effectiveness of federal programs and tax expenditures.

A BILL

To establish the Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking, and for other purposes.

1. Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
**Wicked Problems Perspective**

**PRINCIPLES**

- You don’t understand a wicked problem until you have found an evidence-based solution that works.
- The interconnected nature of wicked problems necessitates an interconnected response.
- Child well-being is an appropriate metric for evaluating the effectiveness of child welfare interventions to support safe and permanent homes for children.

We use the term "wicked" in a meaning akin to … "tricky” … Rittel & Webber. (1973). Dilemmas in a general theory of planning. *Policy Sciences*
National Average Monthly IV-E Funded Caseloads

Courtesy of the Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation
North Carolina Average Monthly IV-E Funded Caseloads

Data Source: Division of Children and Youth Policy, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Courtesy of the Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation
Within extremely broad limits, states should be permitted to change almost any aspect of federally mandated laws and policies on a trial basis—anything from school eligibility rules, to medical reimbursement schedules, to drug-use penalties—as long as they participate in the same kind of structured experimentation program that was operated during the welfare reform period of the 1990s.

“Virtually every aspect of early human development, from the brain’s evolving circuitry to the child’s capacity for empathy is affected by the environments and experiences that are encountered in a cumulative fashion, beginning in the prenatal period and extending throughout the early childhood years.”

Reversing the Damage

Healthy Brain
This PET scan of the brain of a normal child shows regions of high (red) and low (blue and black) activity. At birth, only primitive structures such as the brain stem (center) are fully functional; in regions like the temporal lobes (top), early childhood experiences wire the circuits.

An Abused Brain
This PET scan of the brain of a Romanian Orphan, who was institutionalized shortly after birth, shows the effect of extreme deprivation in infancy. The temporal lobes (top), which regulate emotions and receive input from the senses, are nearly quiescent. Such children suffer emotional and cognitive problems.

Source: http://www.langmaidpractice.com/tag/tools/
Kinship Care is Very Stable

NATIONAL SURVEY OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT WELL-BEING

NSCAW-II 18 mos. follow-up

Children in unrelated foster care were more likely to have 2 and 3 or more placements (p < .001).

Placement at Baseline

- Formal Kin: 74.3% (1 placement), 21.1% (2 placements), 4.5% (3 or more placements)
- Informal Kin: 83.1% (1 placement), 11.6% (2 placements), 5.3% (3 or more placements)
- Foster Care: 46.9% (1 placement), 32.6% (2 placements), 20.5% (3 or more placements)
Children Still Exhibit Extensive Developmental or Emotional/Cognitive Problems 3 Years After Investigation

NATIONAL SURVEY OF CHILD AND ADOLESCENT WELL-BEING

Well-Being Indicators by setting

Well-being indicators suggestive of difference between in-home & out-of-home (formal) care; but not statistically significant.
Is NC doing enough to support alternative caregiving by relatives?

- $0 month: 1,500 are with relatives who receive little or no public support
- $236 month: 500 are with relatives who receive TANF
- $1,162 month: 200 are in licensed kinship homes

Payment for 2 children - Number
Brokering Partnerships

CONSTRAINED
(Narrow Scope of Public Interest)

UNCONSTRAINED
(Diffuse Scope of Public Interest)

TRADITION
(Authority)

Faith-Based Organizations

Voluntary Associations

MARKET
(Liberty)

For-Profit Firms

Public Agencies

SECONDARY STRUCTURES
(Achievement-Universalism)

VOLUNTARY
(Sharing)

STATE
(Equality)

PRIMARY GROUPS
(Particularism-Ascription)
Diversifying Revenue Streams

CONstrained
(Narrow Scope of Public Interest)

Tradition
(Authority)

Voluntary
(Sharing)

Primary Groups
(Particularism-Ascription)

Social Impact Bonds
Corporate Giving

Good Samaritans
Faith-Based Giving

Charitable Giving
Kinship Care

Tax Revenues
IV-E Waivers

MARKET
(Liberty)

SECONDARY STRUCTURES
(Achievement-Universalism)

STATE
(Equality)

Well-Being

UNConstrained
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